

Senate Bill 478
Sponsor: Senator Dan Weinberg
Implement Suicide Prevention Program
March 19, 2007

EXHIBIT 10
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SR 478

Testimony in support of SB 478
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Thank you Senator Weinberg for your sponsorship of this much needed legislation.

Suicide is a serious, lethal, and preventable health issue that plagues our nation. Montana is one of the most vulnerable states that is affected by this health issue. I stress the term "health issue" to hopefully instill an understanding that this problem, if treated with proper medication and mental health attention can be prevented, just as other health problems such as heart disease and diabetes may be treated with proper medication and medical attention.

Suicide crosses the lines of race, gender, and class, and there may be many of you on this committee who have been impacted somehow by the devastation that suicide leaves in its wake. Montana has some unique characteristics that leave its citizens even more susceptible to suicide.

- As a western, rural state, isolation, lack of available mental health resources, and the rugged individualistic thinking contribute to this problem
- Ease of access to firearms and lack of education about safety of firearms, especially when children and young adult males have access.
- High rates of alcoholism (also related to isolation and lack of mental health resources)
- Minimal to no media awareness about the facts of suicide, how to get help, or even how to talk about it.

Populations that are most affected by suicide:

- **Children:** A very obvious group who are affected by suicide in this state. For 10-24 year olds, suicide is the second leading cause of death in Montana (SAMHSA, 2006).
- **Victims of childhood abuse, as well as domestic abuse (both adults and children).** One in four victims of domestic abuse attempt suicide (www.Suicide.org)
- **Native Americans** who are often experiencing the combination of generational impacts of oppression, hopelessness, alcoholism, abuse, and marked lack of mental health resources on the reservation, which all contribute to an increased risk of suicides. For young male Native Americans, this is one of the main causes of death.
- **People with mental illness:** Those suffering from disorders such as Bi-Polar, Major Depression, and Schizophrenia are at a higher risk of attempting and completing suicide.
- **Veterans who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** which has been linked to higher rates of suicide among veterans. Veterans suffering from combat related physical disabilities are also at a higher risk for suicide. Bullman and Kang's (1996) study of veterans found that combat woundedness and physical injury increased suicidal behavior. Several studies have confirmed an increased risk of suicidal behavior in veterans with a diagnosis of PTSD (e.g. Davidson, Hughes, Blazer, & George, 1991; Hendin & Haas, 1991; Kramer, Lindy, Green, Grace & Leonard, 1994). Thoughts of ending one's life as well as previous suicide attempts have been significantly correlated with a diagnosis of PTSD in veterans, as well as 82.6% of veterans in outpatient treatment reporting symptoms of suicidal ideation (Kramer et al., 1994). Moreover, a high preponderance of anxiety disorders, particularly PTSD, has been

found in veterans with completed suicide, relative to the general population of completed suicides (Lehmann, McCormick, & McCracken, 1995).

- **Police officers**, who often suffer quietly from the impacts of PTSD or secondary traumatic stress from simply observing or hearing about threats to the lives of others around them on a consistent daily basis.

There are financial consequences that result from both attempted and completed suicides:

- Approximately 500,000 people a year in the United States require emergency room treatment as a result of a suicide attempt.
- Lost work and productivity (of the victim and relatives or friends) result from attempted and completed suicides.

As you can see, we have many in our state who need the support of this bill. I don't think enough attention can be given to this very serious health problem plaguing our state. The fiscal note required to enact this legislation is such a small amount in comparison to the many Montanans it will no doubt help. I implore this committee to seriously considering the passage of this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,


Kristin Best